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WILDLIFE SERVICES—ALASKA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Alaska

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Alaska Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Alaska is a diverse mix of vast native areas, urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, forests, coastline, islands, and tundra. The size of Alaska and its ecological and geographic diversity give the State a remarkable variety of wildlife species. Alaska is home to millions of migratory birds in the summer and unparalleled populations of native mammals and fish. Because air travel is the primary means of transportation in the State, Alaska boasts more aircraft and airports per capita than anywhere else in the United States.

WS protects the lives of pilots, air passengers, and aircraft from dangerous wildlife collisions with airplanes. WS biologists also assist in protecting the Aleutian Canada goose and numerous species of seabirds from predation by the arctic fox on the Aleutian Island chain. WS addresses serious bird damage to municipal properties



and public and private buildings, and responds to concerns about public health and safety. In addition, WS helps Alaska's farmers and livestock producers reduce agricultural losses from birds and predators.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Air Travel—Every year, lives are endangered worldwide and billions of dollars are wasted when birds and other wildlife damage aircraft. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with airplanes cost the U.S. civil aviation industry more than \$470 million annually. In 1995, a military jet taking off from Alaska's Elmendorf Air Force Base crashed after striking a flock of Canada geese. All 24 crew members were killed and the aircraft was destroyed.

In addition to 24 municipal airports and an estimated 3,000 private airstrips in the State, Alaska owns and operates more than 250 airfields. Alaska has a tremendous seasonal influx of migratory birds,

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife
- Protecting threatened and endangered species from predation by the arctic fox
- Providing oil spill response training to private industry
- Protecting crops, property, and public health and safety from damage by birds, especially Canada geese
- Protecting livestock from predation

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Alaska:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs
- Reducing goose damage through avian infertility
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Improving assessment, sampling, and economic methods for wildlife damage management

and most of Alaska's airports have been constructed in the midst of prime wildlife habitat. This means the vast majority of Alaskan airfields experience some degree of risk that birds or other wildlife will collide with planes in the midst of taking off or landing.

WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) conducts research from its Sandusky, OH field station to reduce wildlife hazards to aviation and reduce risks to the public. Studies are underway at several large U.S. airports where scientists evaluate habitat management practices, and wildlife dispersal techniques. NWRC also maintains the National Wildlife Strike Database used by the Federal Aviation Administration and airports to monitor trends and wildlife species that pose the greatest threat to aviation.

Applying this scientific expertise, the Alaska WS program provides assistance to civilian and military airports across the State. WS conducts on-site evaluations as well as comprehensive wildlife hazard assessments to assist airport managers and other aviation officials in alleviating wildlife hazards.

Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species—WS protects threatened and endangered species from wildlife predation and damage. Alaska's Aleutian Island chain is home to the Aleutian Canada goose and some of the world's largest and most ecologically important colonies of nesting seabirds. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, Russian fur traders and American fur farmers introduced the arctic fox onto numerous islands in the Aleutian chain. This introduction almost caused the extinction of the Aleutian Canada goose and had severe impacts on nesting colonies of seabirds.

For several years, WS has been contracted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to remove arctic foxes from the islands where they are negatively impacting bird populations. This interagency project has been instrumental in the recovery of the Aleutian Canada goose, from record population lows of a few hundred in the late 1970's to more than 20,000 today. In 2001, the Aleutian Canada goose was removed from FWS' list of Federally threatened species due in part to WS' efforts. WS has also enhanced nesting opportunities for other seabird and waterfowl species such as the threatened Stellar's and Spectacled Eiders.



Looking to the Future

In Alaska, the safety of air transportation is a serious and growing concern. Increased air travel throughout Alaska, coupled with substantial populations of migratory birds and other wildlife, have created an urgent need for State and Federal management of wildlife threats. In addition, numerous Alaskan farmers and ranchers request WS' assistance to help minimize damage to agricultural resources from birds and predators. Although aviation and agricultural leaders turn to WS for assistance, limited resources affect WS' ability to respond to all wildlife conflicts. The immense size of Alaska creates additional challenges. More personnel are needed to adequately cover the State, and transportation is required to reach isolated areas that are not accessible by car or truck. These restrictions in combination with WS' infrastructure needs limit the program's ability to respond to wildlife problems in some areas of the State.

Alaska Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

